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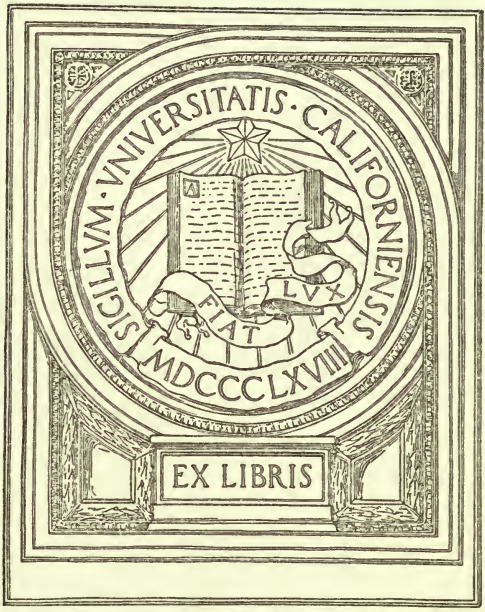
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WASHINGTON IRVING

BY

HENRY W. BOYNTON

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Washington Irving

WASHINGTON IRVING

BY

HENRY W. BOYNTON

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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WASHINGTON IRVING

I

EARLY YEARS AND SURROUNDINGS

IRVING'S name stands as the first landmark in American letters. No other American writer has won the same sort of recognition abroad or esteem at home as became his early in life. And he has lost very little ground, so far as we can judge by the appeal to figures. The copyright on his works ran out long since, and a great many editions of Irving, cheap and costly, complete and incomplete, have been issued from many sources. Yet his original publishers are now selling, year by year, more of his books than ever before. There is little doubt that his work is still widely read, and read not because it is prescribed, but because it gives pleasure; not as the product of a "standard

author," but as the expression of a rich and engaging personality, which has written itself like an indorsement across the face of a young nation's literature. It is that of a man so sensitive that the scornful finger of a child might have left him sleepless; so kindly that nobody ever applied to him in vain for sympathy; so modest that the smallest praise embarrassed him. His manner and tastes were simple and unassuming. He had no great passions; the brother was stronger in him than the lover. To these qualities, which might by themselves belong to ineffectiveness, he added courage, firmness, magnanimity. It was because he was such a man, and because what he was shines on every page he wrote, that the world still warms to him.

Not that so elusive a thing as personal charm can be neatly plotted by the card. We love certain people because we love them; and since that is so, everything they do is interesting to us. A great writer lives in his books, to be sure, but we want to know what he actually did in the flesh. Did

he walk, eat, sleep, like other men? Was he as strong, as human, as lovable as one would think? What sort of boy was he? Did he marry a wife, and was she good enough for him? The world will never believe that such questions are impertinent.

There are, of course, more formal matters to be considered, — his debt to circumstance, his place in the practical world, his influence on the moral or intellectual or national life of his day. Some of these themes may be touched on, even within the narrow limits of the present sketch; not categorically, but rather by way of such suggestion and indirection as may be consistent with a compact narrative.

One of those apparent chances which are the commonplaces of history led William Irving from his far home in the Orkneys, married him to Sarah Sanders, and made him the father of Washington Irving. The Irvings — a branch of the well-known Scotch Irvines — had been for generations the leading family on the Island of Shapinsha.

Finally they had gone threadbare, and with a fortune to seek, William Irving chose the natural ordeal for an islander, the trial by sea. Toward the close of the French War he had become petty officer on an armed English packet. In New York he met Mistress Sanders, who was also English-born, and in 1761 they were married. He must have saved money, for at the end of the war he left the sea, and entered trade in New York.

William Irving and his wife were very different in up-bringing and in temperament. He was a stern man, a strict Presbyterian, with the cold fire of Calvin in his bones. She had been bred an Episcopalian, and was genial and sympathetic by nature. The husband was the master-spirit, and the children grew up under the rigid exactions of his sect. Sunday was a long day of penance, and one of their two half-holidays was consecrated to the cheerful uses of the catechism. To New England ears it all has a familiar sound. When the children grew old enough they promptly left the fold and resigned

themselves to her of Babylon and England. There were eleven of them, and Washington was the youngest, born in New York, April 3, 1783. As a very little child he had the honor of a pat on the head from his great namesake, for whom he was to do an important service many years later.

He was a perfectly normal, healthy boy. Fortunately there are no brilliant sayings to record; he did not lisp in periods. Genius was not written upon his brow, nor tied upon his sleeve. He had none of the pale fervor of precocity, or the shyness of premature conceit. He was absorbed in childish things, loved play, shirked his studies, dreamed of a life on the ocean wave, and regarded "Robinson Crusoe" and "Sinbad the Sailor" as the end of all literary things. The savagery of boyhood he lacked. He was fond of playing battle, but could not bear to see his schoolfellows publicly thrashed, according to the amiable custom of that day. Otherwise he was all that a mother might deplore or an uncle delight in.

Altogether the most interesting story of

his schooldays has a dramatic setting. Addison's "Cato" was to be spouted in public by the schoolchildren. Irving, in the part of Juba, was called a little sooner than he expected, and came on the boards with his mouth full of honey-cake. Speech was out of the question — *vox haesit* — there was a momentary deadlock in his throat. The audience began to laugh, but the prince was not to be counted out. With a skillful rotary finger he removed the viand, and brought down the house by calmly taking up his lines as if nothing had happened. He was then ten years old, and deep in love with the leading lady. A year or two later he had decided to follow the sea; but a short experiment of sleeping on the floor and eating salt pork was too much for his enthusiasm, and at fourteen he gave up the ship. By this time he had begun to fancy that he could write, but there is nothing preserved which shows the least promise.

"When I was young," he said long afterward, "I was led to think that somehow or other everything that was pleasant was

wicked." The theatre was one of the forbidden sweets, and he naturally seized every chance to taste it. Family prayers at nine were something of an interruption, but he had managed a private exit by way of the roof which got him back to the theatre in time for the after-piece. This early liking for the stage he never outgrew. In the meantime he was going through with the ordinary schooling of the New York boy of that period. He learned a little Latin; he hated mathematics, and had very little love for dull books of any sort. At sixteen his formal education was over. Two of his elder brothers had studied at Columbia College, and no doubt Irving might have done the same. He was too lazy, or, to put it more gracefully, too little interested in set tasks. Later he expressed regret for the lost chance, but the loss cannot have been very great for him or for us. If we could imagine that he might have gained any sort of scholarship, its effect upon his writing would still be more than doubtful. His order of genius gains little from bookishness. Addison was

supposed to be a classical scholar, but the "De Coverley Papers" are not a product of scholarship, and we could better spare anything else that he wrote.

At sixteen Irving entered a law office, and for the next five years was understood to be studying law. He had no real aptitude for such study, to be sure, and must have known it; certainly he learned very little law. He had other things to be interested in. He was an eager reader in his own way, and a handsome, well-mannered boy, already fond of society. And I doubt if very much was expected of him in the way of steady application, for during this whole period his health was uncertain. More than once he had to give up study entirely, and go to this watering-place or that for weeks or months. His family and friends were afraid of consumption, and it was against all forecasts that he held his own till manhood.

In 1800 he made his first voyage up the Hudson. "A voyage to Albany then," he wrote in 1851, "was equal to a voyage to

Europe at present, and took almost as much time." The journey was made in a sloop manned by slaves, and commanded by a native of Albany, who spoke nothing but Dutch.

Two years later his brother Peter became proprietor and editor of the New York "Morning Chronicle," for which Irving presently wrote a series of satirical letters signed "Jonathan Oldstyle." In these letters, his earliest work of any significance, he touches the Addisonian string upon which his critics have harped so insistently ever since. They are decidedly clever for a boy of nineteen, but not cleverer than the best college work of to-day, and perhaps more consciously imitative. The fact that they were greatly praised and gained some vogue through copying in other journals, is rather an indication of the unfruitfulness of the period than of their merit. One of their greatest admirers was Charles Brockden Browne, the only American before Irving to make a profession of writing.

In 1804 the young amateur came of age.

He was still threatened with consumption, and his family determined to send him abroad. Nobody felt very sanguine about his returning. As he was helped on board, the captain eyed him dubiously and said in an undertone, "There 's a chap who will go overboard before we get across." If it had been in him to die just then, the captain gave him plenty of time; it was six weeks later when they landed at Bordeaux. But though the voyage had been not over-comfortable, it did him much good. Before the end of it he was scrambling about the vessel, and describes himself as "quite expert at climbing to the masthead, and going out on the maintopsail yard." Irving's body was never to be altogether tractable, but we shall hear nothing further of the consumptive tendency.

His early letters from abroad are full of life and spirits. He jaunted about through France and Italy, picked up acquaintances everywhere, and was evidently much more interested in the people he met than in the "doing" of buildings or galleries. Evi-

dently he was growing stronger all the time. In the company of a little Pennsylvania doctor, whom he had picked up in a diligence, he played several boyish pranks in France; he kicked out an insolent porter at Montpellier, and fell foul of a police spy at Avignon. In the main, however, he was inclined to take things as they came. "There is nothing I dread more," he wrote from Marseilles, "than to be taken for one of the Smellfungi of this world. I therefore endeavor to be pleased with everything about me, and with the masters, mistresses, and servants of the inns, particularly when I perceive they have 'all the dispositions in the world' to serve me; as Sterne says, 'It is enough for Heaven, and ought to be enough for me.'"

At that day the European traveler was not hedged in from adventure. On the way from Genoa to Messina Irving's vessel was boarded by a piratical picaroon. The consequences were not dreadful, but the *mise en scène* was all that could have been desired. The pirates had "fierce black eyes scowling

under enormous bushy eyebrows. . . . They seemed to regard us with the most malignant looks, and I thought I could perceive a sinister smile upon their countenances, as if triumphing over us, who had fallen so easily into their hands." Nothing could have been more satisfactory. At Termini he had a romantic adventure with a masked Turk. At Genoa he was captivated by the beauty of a young Italian lady. Instead of trying to make her acquaintance, as he might easily have done, he contented himself with stealing a handkerchief which she had dropped. Some time later it was stolen from him. Thereupon he wrote an account of the affair to a friend whom he had left in Genoa. The lady heard of it, as ladies will, and sent him a lock of her hair, with a friendly hint that she might be better admired at closer quarters. By a natural paradox of boyish sentiment he did not return to Genoa, but had the hair put into a locket, which he wore for years. It was later unearthed by a friend from a pair of breeches borrowed from Irving, and made the subject of some badinage between them.

Both his brothers and his biographer have made the aimlessness of this first European experience an occasion for something like reproach. His plans were of the vaguest. Such as they were, he was willing to sacrifice any of them for the sake of congenial companionship. After a few weeks he left Rome hurriedly because he could not bear to be parted from a friend who was going to Paris. He was anxious, he told his brothers quaintly, to study various arts and sciences there. In Paris he kept a journal for about three weeks; it records attendance upon a single lecture in botany and seventeen theatrical performances. Naturally his brothers could only see that he was an amiable, idle young fellow, who had drifted into a dilettante attitude toward life, and showed little promise of usefulness. But idling as well as industry has to be judged by its fruits. He was in a real sense seeing life, as he personally needed to see it, not in its passion and mystery, but in its lighter moods of humor and sentiment. Paris frankly seemed to him at this time the most profitable place

in the world. Two months after his arrival, he wrote airily, "You will excuse the shortness and hastiness of this letter, for which I can only plead as an excuse that I am a young man and in Paris." He had momentary fancies as to a possible direction for his talents. A sudden intimacy at Rome with Washington Allston made him think for a time of turning painter. He was something of a dandy, and puts on record a Paris costume of "gray coat, white embroidered vest, and colored small-clothes." Presently he left Paris for London, where Kemble and Mrs. Siddons seem to have pleased him more than anything else English. Three months later he set sail for New York, and arrived in March, 1826, after an absence of nearly two years.

Irving was now twenty-three years old. All that he had done so far was haphazard enough. He had trifled with his schooling, loitered over his law, read a great deal at random, seen many theatres, and made many friends. He had escaped from the valley of the shadow, and was now free to go on in the

primrose way of much society, little literature, and less law. For the next ten or twelve years he was to be little more than a petted man about town.

II

MAN ABOUT TOWN

At that time New York was hardly more than a big village, such as Boston continued to be for a half-century later. Everybody (who was anybody) knew everybody else in the friendly and informal way which nowadays belongs to a "set." Conviviality — this dignified name of the thing best suggests the way in which it was looked at then — was as much a part of fashionable life in New York as in Edinburgh or London. Into this society Irving entered with zest, flirting, dancing, tippling with other young swaggerers according to the mode. He went back nominally to his legal studies, but was really very little concerned with law or gospel. Of this kind of life, "Salmagundi," the first number of which appeared in January, 1807, was the legitimate outcome. It was made up of short satirical sketches of the "Spec-

tator" type. Irving and J. K. Paulding were the principal contributors, but they had some assistance from William Irving and a few others. In the course of a year twenty numbers were published at irregular intervals, when they suddenly ceased to appear. The authors, who wrote under fictitious names, affected from the start complete indifference to fame or profit. Their purpose, they said with whimsical assurance, was simply "to instruct the young, reform the old, correct the town, and castigate the age." The audacity of the thing caught the town; it was a decided success, and very profitable — for the publisher. There is a mildly sophomoric flavor about the "Salmagundi" papers, as there is about Irving's letters of the same period. But they are full of amusing things, and worth reading, too, for the odd side-lights they throw upon the foibles of that old New York.

As he grew older, Irving came to feel the shallowness of fashionable society, but in the Salmagundi days he appears to have asked for nothing better. He had good looks,

good humor, and good manners, showed a proper susceptibility, and knew how to turn a compliment or write a graceful letter. No wonder he found himself welcome wherever he went. After a visit to Philadelphia one of the ladies to whom he had made himself agreeable wrote, "Half the people exist but in the idea that *you* will one day return."

Early in the following year he had a little experience of the practical working of ward politics, which he described in a letter to a certain charming Mary Fairlie: "Truly, this saving one's country is a nauseous piece of business, and if patriotism is such a dirty virtue, — prythee, no more of it. . . . Such haranguing and puffing and strutting among the little great men of the day. Such shoals of unfledged heroes from the lower wards, who had broke away from their mammas, and run to electioneer with a slice of bread and butter in their hands." Irving's patriotism was not found wanting when the time came, but he had a life-long contempt for the petty trickery of party politics. That year he made another of his leisurely jaunts,

nominally on business, this time to Virginia. His letters record the usual round of social gallantries, and some graver matter. Burr's trial was on in Richmond. Irving made his acquaintance, and was retained in some ornamental sense among his counsel. One or two letters from Richmond show a sentimental sympathy for his client of which the less said the better. A characteristic weakness of Irving's was always an unreasoning fondness for the under dog. In the autumn of 1807 his father died, one of the most sincere among the "unco guid," a man whom few people loved and everybody respected.

Not long after the discontinuance of the Salmagundi papers a new idea suggested itself to Irving and his brother Peter, which in its original form does not look especially promising. It was to develop into a really remarkable work, and to place Irving's name in a secure place among living humorists. The "Knickerbocker History of New York" really laid the foundation of his fame. The first plan was for a mere burlesque

of an absurd book just published, a Dr. Samuel Mitchill's "Picture of New York." Mitchill began with the aborigines: the Irvings began with the creation of the world. Fortunately Peter was soon called away to Europe, and Irving was left to his own devices, which presently took a different and more original turn. He threw out most of the pompous erudition which belonged to the work as a burlesque, and condensed what remained. Everything after the five introductory chapters is his own.

At this time he had begun to do commission business for certain New York houses, with a genuine impulse toward steadiness and industry which it is easy to account for. He was deep in love with the second daughter of Mr. Hoffman, in whose office he had originally idled. He had been for years very intimate with the family, and had ended by making a remarkable discovery about one of them. As he was evidently not in a position to marry, he was now setting to work with real energy to improve his means.

Matilda Hoffman was a girl of seventeen, pretty, amiable, and clever. She died of quick consumption in April, 1809. It is certain that they loved each other very much, and that Irving never forgot her. The claim put forth by his nephew and biographer that he gave up marriage for her sake, and was romantically scrupulous in his faithfulness to her memory, seems hardly borne out by the facts. He was crushed for the moment, but not heartbroken. The truth is Irving's nature was sentimental rather than passionate. His love for Miss Hoffman appears to have been the deepest feeling of his life, but it did not absorb his whole nature. The first effect of her loss was to fill him with a sort of horror — the rebellion of a young and sensitive health against the tyranny of death. It was enough to show that the mourner was by no means in desperate case, for extreme grief is not afraid. In after life he never mentioned her name, and wrote of her only once. At the same time pretty faces and the charm of womanly companionship continued to attract him;

indeed, a few years later he openly expressed his expectation of some time marrying. That he did not was clearly due to temper and circumstance rather than to romantic fidelity or abnegation. In the end his susceptibility became purely impersonal; his satisfaction in the exercise of a gentle old-school gallantry did much to take the sting from his life-long bachelorhood. Plainly, Irving was the sort of man who finds a grace in every feminine presence.

It is encouraging to find him in a few months at work again upon the Knickerbocker history. Its appearance was cleverly heralded by a series of preliminary advertisements, announcing the disappearance of one Diedrich Knickerbocker, and the finding of a manuscript history by his hand. The book was published in December, 1809, and made a remarkable impression, in England as well as in America. Henry Brevoort, a close friend of Irving's, in 1813 sent a copy of the second edition to Walter Scott, who wrote at once: "I beg you to accept my best thanks for the uncommon degree of

entertainment which I have received from the most excellently jocose History of New York. . . . I have never read anything so closely resembling the style of Dean Swift as the annals of Diedrich Knickerbocker. I have been employed these few evenings in reading them aloud to Mrs. Scott and two ladies who are our guests, and our sides have been absolutely sore with laughing. I think, too, there are passages which indicate that the author possesses powers of a different kind, and has some touches which remind me much of Sterne."

The work in its completed form is a history of the three Dutch governors of New York, whom Irving uses as a stalking-horse for purposes of satire. Everybody laughed at it except a few descendants of the old Dutch worthies with whose names and characters he had made free. As late as the year 1818, G. C. Verplanck, a personal friend of Irving's, called him to account in an address before the New York Historical Society, to which the first edition of Knickerbocker was gravely dedicated, for "wasting

the riches of his fancy on an ungrateful theme, and his exuberant humor in a coarse caricature." One of his brothers wrote to Irving, deprecating the attack. Irving replied: "I have seen what Verplanck said of my work. He did me more than justice in what he said of my mental qualifications; and he said nothing of my work that I have not long thought of it myself. . . . I am sure he wishes me well, and his own talents and acquirements are too great to suffer him to entertain jealousy; but were I his bitterest enemy, such an opinion have I of his integrity of mind, that I would refer any one to him for an honest account of me, sooner than to almost any one else."

Soon after Knickerbocker came out, Irving went to Albany in the fruitless pursuit of a minor court appointment. There he found his name come not altogether pleasantly before him. "I have somehow or another formed acquaintance with some of the good people," he wrote, "and several of the little Yffrouws, and have even made my way and intrenched myself strongly in the

parlors of several genuine Dutch families, who had declared utter hostility to me." One lady had said that if she were a man she would horsewhip him; but an hour with Irving, who had made a point of meeting her, left her resigned to be a woman.

Irving had now scored his first great literary success. He had proved himself master of a fluent humorous style which might have been applied indefinitely to the treatment of similar themes. He was twenty-seven years old, and there was no reason why the next ten years should not be a most fruitful period. Unfortunately, during most of that time life was made too easy for him. He knew now that he could write, but he had no desire to write for a living. Probably he felt that such a course would be in some way not quite suitable for a man of fashion. At all events, ten years passed, and middle age was at hand before the promising author began to fulfill his promise. Not till 1819 appeared his next literary venture, conceived in a more serious spirit, and launched with many misgivings as the first performance of the professional man of letters.

He had by this time pretty much given up any notion he may have had of living by the law. His attempts to gain civil appointments were not successful. The brilliant younger brother must be provided for; presently Peter and Ebenezer, who were proprietors of a fairly prosperous hardware business, offered him a partnership, with nominal duties and one fifth of the profits. His connection with the firm was at first a sinecure. Later, and when the business had come to the brink of failure, the burden fell upon him, and absorbed his whole time and energies for nearly two years. His literary idling cannot be said to have been due to this entanglement. In his view writing was apparently little more than an agreeable indulgence which had brought him some half-deserved praise, and a pleasant social recognition in desirable quarters. One of the first results of his new connection was a visit to Washington, ostensibly in the interests of the business. The character of his services may be surmised from the fact that his journey from New York to Washington, *via*

Philadelphia and Baltimore, consumed nineteen days; and that was when the affairs of the firm were in some straits, and supposed to be particularly in need of representation at Washington.

In 1812 he accepted the editorship of a periodical called "Select Reviews," to which during the next two years he contributed various critical and biographical articles. He found little to his liking in the editorial and still less in the critical part of his work. "I do not profess," he wrote, "the art and mystery of reviewing, and am not ambitious of being wise or facetious at the expense of others." He was never a good critic, for he was too soft-hearted, and too little in conceit with his own judgment to give an unfavorable opinion. And this was in the period of "slashing" criticism, when it was the proper thing, unless an author could show good reason for being declared the greatest man of the age, to hang, draw, and quarter him on the spot. At about this time, Jeffrey of the "Edinburgh Review," a critic who made the most of his prerogative,

visited America. His coming was heralded by Irving's friend Brevoort in a letter whose ludicrous climax is worth quoting: "It is essential that Jeffrey may imbibe a just estimate of the United States and its inhabitants. . . . Persuade him to visit Washington *and by all means to see the falls of Niagara.*" Apparently Irving received the great Jeffrey with courtesy and composure; as an equal, and not in the least as an idol to be propitiated with gewgaws.

It was an anxious time, the year 1813. The struggle with England had assumed a more serious form. At last the British succeeded in entering Washington, and destroyed most of the public buildings. Irving's attitude had been uncompromisingly American from the outset. This act of vandalism aroused his indignation; he promptly offered his services to Governor Tompkins of New York, and was made an aide on his staff, with the brevet rank of colonel. This position he held for four months, when Governor Tompkins retired from the command. During that time Irving showed much mili-

tary zeal, and enough capacity to be ordered to the front at Sackett's Harbor, at an important moment, with powers of which he made creditable use.

In the spring of 1815 he narrowly escaped sailing with Decatur on the expedition to Algiers. It was largely by his advice that Decatur decided to accept the command. Irving's trunks had been taken on board the commodore's frigate when orders came from Washington delaying the expedition. Irving was afraid that his presence might in some way embarrass the commander, and left the ship at once. He was not to be balked of Europe, however; he was ready to sail and the affairs of the firm seemed to promise an easy competence. On May 25 he embarked for Liverpool, with no very distinct plans, but with no expectation of being long abroad. It was seventeen years before he saw America again.

He reached Liverpool at a dramatic moment. Napoleon had fallen, and the mail coaches were rushing through England with the news of Waterloo. It was the sort of

pageant which always roused Irving's fancy. He was absorbed in the situation.

His letters show that however he may have shrunk from concerning himself with practical politics, he viewed the great *coups* of statecraft with the greatest interest. His sympathies are with Bonaparte ; the English were perhaps too recent enemies to be treated quite charitably. "I have made a short visit to London," he wrote to one of his brothers in July. "The spirits of this nation, as you may suppose, are wonderfully elated by their successes on the Continent, and English pride is inflated to its full distention by the idea of having Paris at the mercy of Wellington and his army. The only thing that annoys the honest mob is that old Louis will not cut throats and lop off heads, and that Wellington will not blow up bridges and monuments, and plunder palaces and galleries. As to Bonaparte, they have disposed of him in a thousand ways ; every fat-sided John Bull has him dished up in a way to please his own palate, excepting that as yet they have not observed the first direction in

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the famous receipt to cook a turbot, — 'First catchy our turbot.' " Then comes a postscript: " The bells are ringing, and this moment news is brought that poor Boney is a prisoner at Plymouth. *John has caught the turbot!* "

Peter Irving was in charge of the firm's English office at Liverpool. He was a bachelor, and Irving had to go to Birmingham, to the house of his brother-in-law, Henry van Wart, to find an American home in England. But he did not make his permanent escape from Liverpool so easily. Not many months had passed before Peter fell ill, had to leave Liverpool, and Irving was left in charge. For over eight months the entire management of an ill-ordered establishment fell into his hands. He seems to have made a thorough attempt to examine and arrange the confusions of the office. He studied bookkeeping, so that he might get some knowledge of the accounts, and otherwise busied himself in a methodical way foreign to his habit. At last, in 1818, the best thing possible under the circumstances

happened, — the business collapsed, and the brothers found a road out of their difficulties by way of the bankruptcy court. It was a great relief. "For upwards of two years," he wrote to Brevoort, "I have been bowed down in spirit, and harassed by the most sordid cares. As yet, I trust, my mind has not lost its elasticity, and I hope to recover some cheerful standing in the world. Indeed, I feel very little solicitude about my own prospects. I trust something will turn up to procure me subsistence, and am convinced, however scanty and precarious may be my lot, I can bring myself to be content. But I feel harassed in mind at times on behalf of my brothers. It is a dismal thing to look round on the wrecks of such a family connection. This is what, in spite of every exertion, will sometimes steep my soul in bitterness."

Irving had now fairly arrived at maturity. The experience of the last few years had done much to sober him. He was still fond of society, and still of a cheerful temper; but the absorbing sophomoric joy in cakes

and ale was now past and not to return. The pinch of necessity had come at last: the world no longer offered him the life of an elegant dawdler. He had a serious business before him, — to gain a competency for himself and his brother. The unpractical younger brother was to be after this the mainstay of the family fortunes. And what especially makes this the finest moment of his life is the sudden and clear perception that to gain this end he must depend upon the steady and fruitful exercise of his gift for writing. It was not to be taken up as a last resort, but as a matter of deliberate choice. Presently he received the offer of a good position on the Navy Board at Washington, with a salary of $2400. A few years earlier he would have snatched at it. "Flattering as the prospect undoubtedly is which your letters hold out," he wrote to his brother Ebenezer, "I have concluded to decline it for various reasons. . . . The principal one is, that I do not wish to undertake any situation that must involve me in such a routine of duties as to prevent my attending to literary pursuits." His de-

termination was sturdy enough, but he was not then nor afterward the master of his moods. "I have heard him say," notes Pierre Irving, "that he was so disturbed by the responsibility he had taken in refusing such an offer and trusting to the uncertain chances of literary success, that for two months he could scarcely write a line." His elder brothers were heartily disappointed by the decision. They could not suppose that he would prove greatly more busy or fruitful in the future than he had in the past, and up to this time, he had done little enough. The youthful "Salmagundi" sketches, the broad satire of the Knickerbocker History were not much for a man of leisure to boast of at thirty-five. But they did not reckon justly with the new seriousness which had come into his purposes. Washington Irving was always fitful in his manner of working, often uncertain of himself and of his work. But from this time on he had no doubt of his calling; he had ceased to be a man about town, and become a man of letters.

III

MAN OF LETTERS — FIRST PERIOD

THE appearance of the "Sketch Book," in 1819, marks the beginning of Irving's professional life as a literary man. It was, moreover, the first original literary work of moment by an American. Two years later Bryant's first volume of poems was published, and Cooper's novels had begun to appear; at this time Irving had the field to himself. Firm as his determination was to depend upon writing for support, he was by no means satisfied with what he was able to do. Even after the complete "Sketch Book" had appeared, and had been met with hearty applause in England and America, he continued to be doubtful of its merits, and embarrassed by its reception. In sending the manuscript of the first number to America, he wrote to his brother Ebenezer: "I have sent the first number of a work which I hope to continue

from time to time. I send it more for the purpose of showing you what I am about, as I find my declining the situation at Washington has given you chagrin. The fact is, that situation would have given me barely a genteel subsistence. It would have led to no higher situations, for I am quite unfitted for political life. My talents are merely literary, and all my habits of thinking, reading, etc., have been in a different direction from that required by the active politician. It is a mistake also to suppose I would fill an office there, and devote myself at the same time to literature. I require much leisure, and a mind entirely abstracted from other cares and occupations, if I would write much or write well. . . . If I ever get any solid credit with the public, it must be in the quiet and assiduous operations of my pen, under the mere guidance of fancy or feeling. . . . I feel myself completely committed in literary reputation by what I have already written; and I feel by no means satisfied to rest my reputation on my preceding writings. I have suffered several precious

years of youth and lively imagination to pass by unimproved, and it behooves me to make the most of what is left. If I indeed have the means within me of establishing a legitimate literary reputation, this is the very period of life most auspicious for it, and I am resolved to devote a few years exclusively to the attempt. . . . In fact, I consider myself at present as making a literary experiment, in the course of which I only care to be kept in bread and cheese. Should it not succeed — should my writings not acquire critical applause, I am content to throw up the pen and take to any commonplace employment. But if they should succeed, it would repay me for a world of care and privation to be placed among the established authors of my country, and to win the affections of my countrymen. . . . Do not, I beseech you, impute my lingering in Europe to any indifference to my own country or my friends. . . . I am determined not to return home until I have sent some writings before me that shall, if they have merit, make me return to the smiles, rather than skulk back to the pity, of my friends."

To Brevoort he wrote at the same time: "I have attempted no lofty theme, nor sought to look wise and learned, which appears to be very much the fashion among our American writers, at present. I have preferred addressing myself to the feeling and fancy of the reader, more than to his judgment. My writings, therefore, may appear light and trifling in our country of philosophers and politicians; but if they possess merit in the class of literature to which they belong, it is all to which I aspire in the work. I seek only to blow a flute accompaniment in the national concert, and leave others to play the fiddle and French horn."

The favorable reception of the "Sketch Book" not only failed to remove his diffidence, but left him oppressed by a new sense of obligation to the public which had lauded his work. This feeling is expressed in a letter to Leslie, the painter, with whom he had become very intimate: "I am glad to find the second number pleases more than the first. The sale is very rapid, and, alto-

gether, the success exceeds my most sanguine expectation. Now you suppose I am all on the alert, full of spirit and excitement. No such thing. I am just as good for nothing as ever I was; and indeed I have been flurried and put out of my way by these puffings. I feel something as I suppose you did when your picture met with success — anxious to do something better, and at a loss what to do."

Murray, who a little later was eager to publish anything from Irving's hand, declined to undertake the first English edition of the "Sketch Book." Irving was afraid of some incomplete pirated edition, and finally published the first number entirely at his own expense. Murray was glad enough to change his mind and bring out the later numbers. Among the many friends whom the young American had made in England was Walter Scott. A few days spent by Irving at Abbotsford had been enough to attach them strongly to each other. Scott had by no means outgrown his interest in the author of the "Knickerbocker History,"

and Irving found nothing that was not delightful in the great romancer's character and way of life. "As to Scott," he wrote, "I cannot express my delight at his character and manners. He is a sterling, golden-hearted old worthy, full of the joyousness of youth, with an imagination continually furnishing forth pictures, and a charming simplicity of manner that puts you at ease with him in a moment. It has been a constant source of pleasure to me to remark his deportment towards his family, his neighbors, his domestics, his very dogs and cats; everything that comes within his influence seems to catch a beam of that sunshine that plays round his heart." Now, while the prospects of the "Sketch Book" were still dubious, Scott offered him the editorship of an Anti-Jacobin magazine. Irving declined it, first on the ground of his dislike for politics, and second on account of his irregular habits of mind. "My whole course of life has been desultory, and I am unfitted for any periodically recurring task, or any stipulated labor of body or mind. I have no

command of my talents such as they are, and have to watch the varyings of my mind as I would a weathercock. Practice and training may bring me more into rule; but at present I am as useless for regular service as one of my own country Indians or a Don Cossack."

In August of this year, Irving and his brother Peter left England for the Continent. They had got no farther than Havre when their fancy was taken with an apparent business opening for Peter, who had been idle since the failure of the firm. A steamboat had just been put upon the Seine, to run between Havre and Rouen. Peter should be a chief stockholder and director; he and Washington would each put in $5000, and between Havre and Rouen the river would presently run gold for them. To be sure the money was yet to be found, but there were brothers William and Ebenezer, who would no doubt be glad to help set that little golden river flowing. Unfortunately brothers William and Ebenezer did not approve of the scheme at all. They

flatly refused to lend brother Peter $5000, or to honor brother Washington's drafts for the same amount. More unfortunately still, Irving had already committed himself. All of his literary property had to be disposed of, to provide the pledged amount, which was forthwith placed in the little steamboat on the Seine, and never heard of more. Peter was associated with the management, and kept busy, at least, for several years. This was the first of a long series of business ventures which made Irving's life uneasy. He would no sooner turn a few thousand by writing than he must sink it in this or that absolutely safe and immensely profitable enterprise. It was not for many years that he learned how certainly he might count upon disastrous results from such experiments.

After the settlement of this affair, Irving took lodgings in Paris. Here he met Tom Moore, and in his house more than anywhere else he became intimate. Moore's diary makes frequent mention of him; one of the most interesting entries records that

Irving at this time wrote in ten days one hundred and thirty pages of the "Sketch Book" size. This was undoubtedly material for "Bracebridge Hall," the suggestion of which had come from Moore. In the meantime the "Sketch Book" had continued to gain ground in England. Byron admired it greatly, and its popularity with the general public may be judged from the fact that it was commonly attributed to Scott. Irving described himself in a letter to Murray as leading "a 'miscellaneous' kind of life at Paris. . . . Anacreon Moore is living here, and has made me a gayer fellow than I could have wished; but I found it impossible to resist the charm of his society."

In July (1821) he returned to London, in poor physical condition. He had now been tormented at intervals for several years by an eruptive complaint which kept him from exercise, and brought on other troubles. After his return he was bedridden for four or five months, most of which he passed at his sister's house in Birmingham. He grew very fond of his little nephews and nieces —

particularly an urchin named George, of whom his letters record such items as: "George has made his appearance in a new pair of Grimaldi breeches, with pockets full as deep as the former. To balance his ball and marbles, he has the opposite pocket filled with a peg-top and a quantity of dry peas, so that he can only lie comfortably on his back or belly." He was by no means idle at this time. In January of the following year he sent the manuscript of "Bracebridge Hall" to his brother Ebenezer with the remark, "My health is still unrestored. This work has kept me from getting well, and my indisposition on the other hand has retarded the work. I have now been about five weeks in London, and have only once been out of doors, about a month since, and that made me worse." That single escape from the sick-room, his biographer says, was made for the sake of persuading Murray to publish Cooper's "Spy," which had already appeared in America. Irving's own experience was duplicated: Murray refused to take "The Spy," but was glad to publish

Cooper's later work. He now gave Irving a thousand guineas for the English rights in "Bracebridge Hall." It was less than he might have given, but Irving could never be persuaded to haggle over prices. He seems to have agreed with Peter, who wrote cheerfully, "A thousand guineas has a golden sound." It was the amount which had been sunk in poor Peter's steamboat, which was still making its unprofitable trips up and down the Seine; and two hundred guineas of this thousand soon passed into his pocket, where no doubt he found their melody even pleasanter.

"Bracebridge Hall" was well received; and confirmed its author's reputation, especially in England. He had only to be passive to find himself overwhelmed with social engagements. A more liberal diet and plenty of exercise had improved his condition, and for a month or so after getting rid of "Bracebridge Hall," he gave himself up to the engagements of a London season. But his ankles soon began to trouble him again, and in July, 1822, he set out for Aix-la-Chapelle,

where he hoped to get permanent relief from his distressing complaint. He found nothing to keep him long at Aix. The baths and waters were well enough, but he was too dependent upon cheerful companionship to endure life among a company of invalids. He began a leisurely round of the Continental watering-places, staying a few weeks here and a few days there, and gradually improving in condition. Toward the close of the year he brought up at Dresden.

The only touch of mystery which belongs to the story of Irving is connected with this six months' stay at Dresden. He made many friends there, and grew especially intimate with an English family named Foster, a mother and two daughters. It is said — and denied — that he would have liked to marry the youngest daughter, Emily. His biographer insists that there was nothing in the affair but friendship. To Mrs. Foster he wrote the only account he ever gave of his early love and loss; and his nephew quotes the closing passage as proof that he had no thought of marrying Emily Foster,

however fond of her he may have been: "You wonder why I am not married. I have shown you why I was not long since. When I had sufficiently recovered from that loss, I became involved in ruin. It was not for a man broken down in the world, to drag down any woman to his paltry circumstances. I was too proud to tolerate the idea of ever mending my circumstances by matrimony. My time has now gone by; and I have growing claims upon my thoughts and upon my means, slender and precarious as they are. I feel as if I had already a family to think and provide for."

But this might be the modest speech of a middle-aged lover. Years later the written reminiscences of the two daughters unmistakably impute the attentions of the brilliant American to something more than friendliness. It is certain that he had a very warm feeling for somebody or something in Dresden, which led to a temporary return of his youthful delight in society. For his time was by no means given up to the Fosters. He was received into the life of the little

German court, and evidently derived such pleasure as is proper to a Republican from dancing with princesses, and acting in private theatricals with Highnesses and Excellencies. On the whole it seems to have been a peaceful, idle, rather trivial time of sojourn among congenial people. He danced, he strolled, he wrote verses to little Miss Emily; in short, he enjoyed himself as a youngish man may, whether the muse is waiting for him, or some less high-flown customer. "I wish I could give you a good account of my literary labors," he wrote his sister after several months in Dresden, "but I have nothing to report. I am merely seeing, and hearing, and my mind seems in too crowded and confused a state to produce anything. I am getting very familiar with the German language; and there is a lady here who is so kind as to give me lessons every day in Italian [Mrs. Foster], which language I have nearly forgotten, but which I am fast regaining. Another lady is superintending my French [Miss Emily Foster], so that if I am not acquiring ideas, I am at least acquir-

ing a variety of modes of expressing them when they do come." Very likely the confusion of his mind was not lessened by the frequency of those French lessons. There really seems to be no reason for doubting the testimony of the elder sister's journal; "He has written. He has confessed to my mother, as to a dear and true friend, his love for E——, and his conviction of its utter hopelessness. He feels himself unable to combat it. He thinks he must try, by absence, to bring more peace to his mind. . . . He has almost resolved to make a tour in Silesia, which will keep him absent for a few weeks." The tour in Silesia was certainly made; and during the brief absence Irving wrote sundry sentimental letters to Mrs. Foster. There are occasions when he seems to imagine a pretty daughter looking over the admirable mother's shoulder, and being much affected by the famous author's tenderness for Dresden. Presently he comes back to be their escort, for they are going home to England; and at Rotterdam the good-bys are said. They met afterward in England, but the old intimacy was gone.

More than thirty years after, Irving had a letter from a Mrs. Emily Fuller, whose name he did not know. Pleasantly and discreetly it recalled those happy Emily Foster days in Dresden. "She addresses him because she hopes that her eldest boy Henry may have the happiness and advantage of meeting him." Poor Irving! Her eldest boy Henry. . . . Well, the sting was all gone by that time, fortunately. His reply is all that it ought to be, and nothing more.

Those first days in Paris were not cheerful ones for Irving. His pleasant dream was over, and he had forgotten what to do with waking moments. His memorandum-book records that he felt oppressed by "a strange horror on his mind — a dread of future evil — of failure in future literary attempts — a dismal foreboding that he could not drive off by any effort of reason." "When I once get going again with my pen," he wrote to Peter, "I mean to keep on steadily, until I can scrape together enough to produce a regular income, however moderate. We shall then be independent of the world and

its chances." But he could not manage to get going. For some time he could write nothing at all. Fortunately, after an unprofitable month or two, he fell in with John Howard Payne, now remembered only for his "Home, Sweet Home," but then esteemed as an actor and dramatist. Irving had met him several years before, and now became associated with him in some dramatic translating and adapting. The results were nearly worthless from a literary point of view, but served to keep him busy, and to put him once more in the writing vein.

For some time Murray had been pressing him hard for copy, and in the spring of 1824 the "Tales of a Traveler" were completed and sent to press. After the task of proof-reading came a reaction of high spirits which expressed itself in the most amusing letter Irving ever wrote: —

"Brighton, August 14, 1824.

"My boat is on the shore,
And my bark is on the sea.

"I forget how the song ends, but here I am at Brighton just on the point of embarking

for France. I have dragged myself out of London, as a horse drags himself out of the slough, or a fly out of a honey-pot, almost leaving a limb behind him at every tug. Not that I have been immersed in pleasure and surrounded by sweets, but rather up to the ears in ink and harassed by printers' devils.

"I never have had such fagging in altering, adding, and correcting; and I have been detained beyond all patience by the delays of the press. Yesterday I absolutely broke away, without waiting for the last sheets. They are to be sent after me here by mail, to be corrected this morning, or else they must take their chance. From the time I first started pen in hand on this work, it has been nothing but hard driving with me.

"I have not been able to get to Tunbridge to see the Donegals, which I really and greatly regret. Indeed I have seen nobody except a friend or two who had the kindness to hunt me out. Among these was Mr. Story, and I ate a dinner there that it took me a week to digest, having been obliged to

swallow so much hard-favored nonsense from a loud-talking baronet whose name, thank God, I forget, but who maintained Byron was not a man of courage, and therefore his poetry was not readable. I was really afraid he would bring John Story to the same way of thinking.

"I went a few evenings since to see Kenney's new piece, the Alcaid. It went off lamely, and the Alcaid is rather a bore, and comes near to be generally thought so. Poor Kenney came to my room next evening, and I could not believe that one night could have ruined a man so completely. I swear to you I thought at first it was a flimsy suit of clothes had left some bedside and walked into my room without waiting for the owner to get up; or that it was one of those frames on which clothiers stretch coats at their shop doors; until I perceived a thin face sticking edgeways out of the collar of the coat like the axe in a bundle of fasces. He was so thin, and pale, and nervous, and exhausted — he made a dozen difficulties in getting over a spot in the carpet, and never would

have accomplished it if he had not lifted himself over by the points in his shirt-collar.

"I saw Rogers just as I was leaving town. I had not time to ask him any particulars about you, and indeed he is not exactly the man from whom I would ask news about my friends. I dined tête-à-tête with him some time ago, and he served up his friends as he served up his fish, with a squeeze of lemon over each. It was very piquant, but it rather set my teeth on edge. . . .

"Farewell, my dear Moore. Let me hear from you, if but a line; particularly if my work pleases you, but don't say a word against it. I am easily put out of humor with what I do."

Surely no more delicious bit of nonsense was ever written than the description of poor Kenney. Moore read it to a group of friends in the presence of the victim — a situation which would have been too "piquant" for Irving's taste.

Moore had only the desired praise for the "Tales of a Traveler," but elsewhere it did not fare so well. Irving considered it on the

whole his best work; but though it had a large sale, its reception in England was not quite what he had hoped for; and in America it was received by the press with something like hostility. Unfortunately some busybody in America made it his concern to forward to Irving all the ill-natured flings which could be gleaned from American notices of the new book. The incident — with all its unpleasantness — was trifling enough, but to Irving's raw sensitiveness it was torture. He was overwhelmed with an almost ludicrous melancholy, could not write, could not sleep, could not bear to be alone. This petty outburst of critical spleen, backed as it evidently was by personal antagonism on the part of a few obscure journalists, actually left him dumb for more than a year.

Of course the public was right in its general estimate of the "Tales of a Traveler": they are not as good as the "Sketch Book." In kind they are similar — that in itself would be enough to excite prejudice against new work from an author who had been so long before the public; but they are also

undeniably inferior in quality. One or two of the stories are distinctly morbid in tone, several give the impression of being long drawn out. In some way the collection lacks atmosphere; Italian scenery is painted with accuracy, but not Italian life or character. Irving could draw the early Dutch in America, or the mediæval Moors in Spain, or the Englishman in England or Italy: the modern Italian on his own soil he did not know except in his melodramatic exterior.

Irving had now given his brother Peter a place in his little ménage. The steamboat scheme had failed utterly, and he had from this time on no sort of regular employment. Irving set himself cheerfully to provide for both. His goal at this time was less fame than fortune — "by every exertion to attain sufficient to make us both independent for the rest of our lives." Not for many years did he come to perceive that a life of leisure was not only impossible, but undesirable for him, and to express it as his fondest wish that he might "die in harness." The profits of the "Tales of a Traveler" went the

way of most of his earnings — this time to help develop a Bolivia copper mine.

He had been studying Spanish for a year or two, and had an increased desire to see Spain. As a mere aid in traveling, he asked for the nominal post of attaché to the American legation at Madrid. Alexander H. Everett, then minister to Spain, at once granted the request, and in replying suggested a possible literary task — the translation of a new Spanish work, Navarrete's "Voyages of Columbus," which was shortly to make its appearance. Murray, who was then in some difficulties, did not think favorably of the project.

Irving went to Madrid, and by good fortune got lodgings with the American consul Rich, who had made an extensive private collection of documents dealing with early American history. Presently Navarrete's work was published, and found to be "rather a mass of rich materials for history than a history itself." This was in February, 1826. Irving at once began to take notes and sift materials for an original history of Colum-

bus. For six months he worked incessantly. "Sometimes," says his biographer, "he would write all day and until twelve at night; in one instance his note-book shows him to have written from five in the morning until eight at night, stopping only for meals."

IV

MAN OF LETTERS — SECOND PERIOD

THERE is something interesting, and in a sense pathetic, in this sudden steady diligence from the man of desultory habits, who had never written but by whim, whose finger had always been lifted to catch the lightest literary airs. Here, at last, was the firm trade wind, and the satisfaction of steady and methodical progress. The qualified success of the "Tales of a Traveler" had led him to feel that his vein was running out. The prospect of producing a solid work gave him keen pleasure. One cannot be always building castles in the air; why not try a pyramid, if only a little one? Since the world is perfectly delighted with our pretty things, very well, let us show that we can do a sublime thing. As for history — "Whatever may be the use of this sort of composition in itself and abstractedly," says

Walter Bagehot, "it is certainly of great use relatively and to literary men. Consider the position of a man of that species. He sits beside a library fire, with nice white paper, a good pen, a capital style — every means of saying everything, but nothing to say. Of course he is an able man; of course he has an active intellect, besides wonderful culture: but still, one cannot always have original ideas. Every day cannot be an era; a train of new speculation very often will not be found: and how dull it is to make it your business to write, to stay by yourself in a room to write, and then to have nothing to say! It is dreary work mending seven pens, and waiting for a theory to 'turn up.' What a gain if something would happen! then one could describe it. Something has happened, and that something is history."

There is no doubt that Irving's early delicate sallies in literature represent his best. In a single department of belles-lettres he had shown mastery. During the remainder of his life he continued to work at intervals in that field with similar felicity; and, for

the rest, to write amiably and respectably upon many topics foreign to his natural bent. But his greatest work was done in odd moments and at a heat; all the method in the world could not increase his real stature by a cubit.

A word may perhaps be said here of Irving as an historian and biographer. Of course he could not write dully; his histories are just as readable as Goldsmith's, and rather more veracious. But he plainly had not the scholar's training and methods which we now demand of the historian; nor had he the larger view of men and events in their perspective. Generalization was beyond him. Fortunately to generalize is only a part of the business of the historian. To catch some dim historic figure, and give it life and color, — this power he had. And it was evidently this which gave him the praise of such men as Prescott and Bancroft and Motley. Washington had begun to loom vaguely and impersonally in the mind, a mere great man, when Irving with a touch turned him from cold bronze into flesh and blood again.

During the years of Irving's stay abroad other American writers had come into notice. Bryant's poetry had become well known. Cooper had produced "The Spy," "The Pilot," "The Pioneers," and "The Last of the Mohicans." In 1827 appeared the first volume of poems by Edgar Allan Poe. In this year, too, Irving's diary records a meeting with Longfellow, who was then twenty-one, and came abroad to prepare himself for his professorship at Bowdoin. Longfellow's recollection of the incident is worth quoting: "I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Irving in Spain, and found the author, whom I had loved, repeated in the man. The same playful humor; the same touches of sentiment; the same poetic atmosphere; and, what I admired still more, the entire absence of all literary jealousy, of all that mean avarice of fame, which counts what is given to another as so much taken from one's self—

> "'And trembling, hears in every breeze
> The laurels of Miltiades.'"

In the following summer the "History of

Columbus" was finished, and sold to Murray. It won high praise from the reviewers, especially from Alexander H. Everett, his former diplomatic chief, and at this time editor of the "North American Review."

Early in the following year he made his first visit to Andalusian Spain. In the course of his grubbing among the Columbus archives, he had found a good deal of interesting material about the Moorish occupancy. The beauty of the country and the grandeur of its Moorish relics took strong hold upon him. In April, 1828, he settled in Seville, and there the "Chronicles of the Conquest of Granada" were written. By this time the market price of his wares had gone up very much. There is no doubt that his historical work had increased his temporary reputation. Murray gave him 2000 guineas for the "Conquest of Granada;" he further offered him £1000 a year to edit a new literary and scientific magazine, as well as £100 an article for any contribution he might choose to make to the "London Quarterly." He refused the first offer on the

ground that he did not care to be tied in England, the second because the "Quarterly" had always been hostile to America. He continued to take an interest in affairs at home. Impatient as he was of political methods, he had opinions of his own as to candidates and measures. The election of Jackson called forth the following comment in a letter to Mr. Everett: "I was rather sorry when Mr. Adams was first raised to the presidency, but I am much more so at his being displaced; for he has made a far better president than I expected, and I am loth to see a man superseded who has filled his station worthily. These frequent changes in our administration are prejudicial to the country; we ought to be wary of using our power of changing our chief magistrate when the welfare of the country does not require it. In the present election there has, doubtless, been much honest, warm, grateful feeling toward Jackson, but I fear much pique, passion, and caprice as it respects Mr. Adams.

"Since the old general was to be the man,

however, I am well pleased upon the whole that he has a great majority, as it will, for the reasons you mention, produce a political calm in the country, and lull those angry passions which have been exasperated during the Adams administration, by the close contest of nearly balanced parties. As to the old general, with all his *hickory* characteristics, I suspect he has good stuff in him, and will make a sagacious, independent, and high-spirited president; and I doubt his making so high-handed a one as many imagine."

The "Chronicles of the Conquest of Granada" were well treated by critics, but never very popular. The humor of the mythical Fray Antonio's narrative was too sly and covert; the public was mystified, and had half a notion it was being made game of. But Irving was not yet done with Granada. Presently he went back, and in the course of a solitary two months in the Alhambra, got together the materials for the most characteristic work he had published since the "Tales of a Traveler" and the strongest

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since the "Sketch Book." His idyllic stay in the Alhambra was one of the pleasantest episodes of his life. When it was cut short by his appointment as secretary of legation at London, he made up his mind to leave the quiet breathing-spot with real regret. One cannot help seeing from the tone of his letter to Peter that the years have given him as much as they have taken away: "My only horror is the bustle and turmoil of the world: how shall I stand it after the delicious quiet and repose of the Alhambra? I had intended, however, to quit this place before long, and, indeed, was almost reproaching myself for protracting my sojourn, having little better than sheer self-indulgence to plead for it; for the effect of the climate, the air, the serenity and sweetness of the place, is almost as seductive as that of the Castle of Indolence, and I feel at times an impossibility of working, or of doing anything but yielding to a mere voluptuousness of sensation."

At London he found himself associated with congenial men, but tied so closely to

the legation that he could not even get away to visit his sister at Birmingham. The constraint chafed him at first, but before long his letters show him reconciled, and even interested in the practical business of diplomacy. They complain, however, of his growing stout. This, indeed, he had a perfect right to do. He was now forty-seven years old, and a man of solid reputation; weighty honors were being heaped upon him. Before leaving Spain he had been made a member of the Spanish Royal Academy of History; and in England he had just received a medal from the Royal Society of Literature, and the degree of LL. D. from Oxford. His leisure for literary work was not great in London, but he was making some progress with the Alhambra stories, and had begun to think seriously of the "Life of Washington," which was to hold the main place in his thoughts for the rest of his life.

At this time England was suffering under the double discomfort of cholera and the Reform Bill. A letter from Irving to his

brother shows that even in the midst of his successes the popular author was subject to moods of mental gloom, and even to business difficulties: "The restlessness and uncertainty in which I have been kept have disordered my mind and feelings too much for imaginative writing, and I now doubt whether I could get the Alhambra ready in time for Christmas. . . . The present state of things here completely discourages the idea of publication of any kind. There is no knowing who among the booksellers is safe. Those who have published most are worst off, for in this time of public excitement nobody reads books or buys them."

In 1831, Van Buren was nominated as Minister to the Court of St. James, and at once took charge of his diplomatic duties. His nomination was rejected by the Senate, however; and Irving determined to take advantage of the incident to make his own escape from the service, and return at last to America.

In May, 1831, he arrived in New York. He had been a young man when he left

America; he was now leaning toward the farther verge of his prime. In character he had refined and sobered greatly; and he had more than fulfilled his promise of literary excellence. He had still twenty-six years to live, and was to do much useful service in life and letters; but he could do nothing in that time to alter his reputation; he could merely confirm it. Irving had grown immensely, too, in the favor of his countrymen. He was welcomed back with extravagant effusion by his old friends and by the country at large. He had in fact come to be regarded as one of the chief glories of America; for he had been the first to make her a world-power in literature.

During those seventeen years New York had changed almost beyond recognition in size, in appearance, in the tone of its life; but Irving was delighted with everything and everybody. All that he had to regret was the ordeal of a great public dinner in his honor, at which, after a great deal of preliminary nervousness, he made the one speech of his life. It was a good speech, but

he could never be prevailed upon to repeat the experiment. He was always at his worst in a large company. The sight of a great number of unknown or half-known faces confused his thoughts and clogged his tongue. His intimates knew him for a brilliant and ready talker, full of easy fun and unaffected sentiment.

Not long after his return, the "Tales of the Alhambra" were published. In the somewhat florid concert of critical praises which greeted the book, a simple theme is dominant. Everybody felt that in these stories Irving had come back to his own. The material was very different from that of the "Sketch Book," yet it yielded to similar treatment. The grace, romance, humor, of this "beautiful Spanish Sketch Book," as the historian Prescott called it, appealed at once to an audience which had listened somewhat coldly to the less spontaneous "Tales of a Traveler," and had given a formal approbation to the "History of Columbus," without finding very much Irving in it.

A visit to Washington to clear up various

odds and ends of his diplomatic experience resulted in an interview with President Jackson, which he reported in a letter to Peter Irving, now living alone in Paris: "I have been most kindly received by the old general, with whom I am much pleased as well as amused. As his admirers say, he is truly an *old Roman* — to which I could add, *with a little dash of the Greek;* for I suspect he is as *knowing* as I believe he is *honest.* I took care to put myself promptly on a fair and independent footing with him; for, in expressing warmly and sincerely how much I had been gratified by the unsought but most seasonable mark of confidence he had shown me, when he hinted something about a disposition to place me elsewhere, I let him know emphatically that I wished for nothing more — that my whole desire was to live among my countrymen, and to follow my usual pursuits. In fact, I am persuaded that my true course is to be master of myself and of my time. Official station cannot add to my happiness or respectability, and certainly would stand in the way of my

literary career." This disinclination to take office he never got over, although he was frequently approached with offers of place. In 1834, he was offered a nomination for Congress by the Jackson party; in 1838, he was offered the Tammany nomination as mayor of New York, and the secretaryship of the navy by Van Buren. And when three years later he was given a still more important post, it was only the evident spontaneity of the choice, and the feeling that in taking the office he should be representing country rather than party, which led him to accept it.

Impatient as he was of political methods, he had opinions of his own on specific questions, and a broad political platform which he once stated in a letter to his old friend Kemble: —

"As far as I know my own mind, I am thoroughly a republican, and attached, from complete conviction, to the institutions of my country; but I am a republican without gall, and have no bitterness in my creed. I have no relish for puritans either in reli-

gion or politics, who are for pushing principles to an extreme, and for overturning everything that stands in the way of their own zealous career. I have, therefore, felt a strong distaste for some of those loco-foco luminaries who of late have been urging strong and sweeping measures, subversive of the interests of great classes of the community. Their doctrines may be excellent in theory, but, if enforced in violent and uncompromising opposition to all our habitudes, may produce the most distressing effects. The best of remedies must be cautiously applied, and suited to the state and constitution of the patient; otherwise, what is intended to cure, may produce convulsion. The late elections have shown that the measures proposed by Government are repugnant to the feelings and habitudes or disastrous to the interests of great portions of our fellow citizens. They should not, then, be forced home with rigor. Ours is a government of compromise. We have several great and distinct interests bound up together, which, if not separately consulted and sev-

erally accommodated, may harass and impair each other. A stern, inflexible, and uniform policy may do for a small compact republic, like one of those of ancient Greece, where there is a unity of character, habits, and interests; but a more accommodating, discriminating, and variable policy must be observed in a vast republic like ours, formed of a variety of states widely differing in habits, pursuits, characters, and climes, and banded together by a few general ties.

"I always distrust the soundness of political councils that are accompanied by acrimonious and disparaging attacks upon any great class of our fellow citizens. Such are those urged to the disadvantage of the great trading and financial classes of our country. You yourself know, from education and experience, how important these classes are to the prosperous conduct of the complicated affairs of this immense empire. You yourself know, in spite of all the commonplace cant and obloquy that has been cast upon them by political spouters and scribblers, what general good faith and fair dealing prevails throughout these classes."

At this time he was studying with increasing interest the shifting spectacle of American life. The openings of the West especially caught his imagination, and when the chance came to travel on what was then the frontier, the trans-Mississippi territories, he was quick to accept it. As guest of one of the members of a commission appointed to treat with several Indian tribes, he went as far as Fort Gibson on the Arkansas. The literary fruits of this journey were "A Tour on the Prairies," and "The Adventures of Captain Bonneville."

In April, 1833, he bought the little estate of Sunnyside, near the Sleepy Hollow which he had made famous. His first name for it was "The Roost" (Dutch for "Rest"), which he changed for reasons which are not recorded; possibly the little nieces who became regular inmates may have thought the old name not dignified enough. This he regarded as his home for the rest of his life. He set to work at once to enlarge the old Dutch stone cottage which stood upon the place; and from this time on he is

continually "puttering" about the estate, building a poultry-yard here, planting trees there, with the full zeal of the rural landlord. His family letters are given to accounts of little country doings: "The goose war is happily terminated: Mr. Jones' squadron has left my waters, and my feathered navy now plows the Tappan Sea in triumph. I cannot but attribute this great victory to the valor and good conduct of the enterprising little duck, who seems to enjoy great power and popularity among both geese and ganders, and absolutely to be the master of the fleet. . . . I am happy to inform you that, among the many other blessings brought to the cottage by the good Mr. Lawrence is a pig of first-rate stock and lineage. It has been duly put in possession of the palace in the rear of the barn, where it is shown to every visitor with as much pride as if it was the youngest child of a family. As it is of the fair sex, and in the opinion of the best judges a pig of peerless beauty, I have named it 'Fanny.' I know it is a name which with Kate and you has a

romantic charm, and about the cottage everything, as old Mrs. Marthing says, must be romance." This was during the vogue of Fanny Kemble.

In this quiet retreat the next five uneventful years were passed, with occasional excursions to New York or farther, which only served to make the seclusion of the country home more inviting. Peter Irving spent his last days at the Roost; and Ebenezer Irving and his family gave up their New York house to make their home with the now famous brother. While this arrangement greatly increased Irving's satisfaction in life, it made heavy demands upon his purse. One cannot be a country gentleman for nothing. The cottage had to be enlarged repeatedly, the grounds cared for; and the mere running expenses were a considerable matter for a man without dependable income. Irving had by this time received a great deal of money for his books, but an unfortunate "knack of hoping" had locked up most of it in unprofitable land speculations.

In 1835 the three volumes of the "Crayon

Miscellanies," were published. The "Tour on the Prairies" was especially palatable to Americans. Edward Everett said of it, in the highly colored style of the period: "We are proud of Mr. Irving's sketches of English life, proud of the gorgeous canvas upon which he has gathered in so much of the glowing imagery of Moorish times. We behold with delight his easy and triumphant march over these beaten fields; but we glow with rapture as we see him coming back, laden with the poetical treasures of the primitive wilderness, rich with spoil from the uninhabited desert."

The second volume, containing "Abbotsford" and "Newstead Abbey," naturally gained special praise in England; the third, "Legends of the Conquest of Spain," had comparatively little success.

Of "Astoria" (1836) it is hard to know what to say; on the whole, it seems the most doubtful of his works in motive and quality. John Jacob Astor, now an old man, was anxious to perpetuate the fame of his commercial exploits, and was lucky

enough to subsidize for this purpose the most prominent American writer of the day. The adventures of the various expeditions sent out to found an American trading company on the Pacific coast are interesting; but one puts down Irving's account of them with the feeling that it reflects rather more credit on Mr. Astor than on the writer. The truth is, Irving, like many less successful literary men, was constantly in need of money; and he had begun to be in some difficulty for subjects upon which to exercise his craft. The "Adventures of Captain Bonneville" (1837) was also a piece of skillful book-making rather than an original creative work; and after that nearly two years passed without his writing anything.

At last, toward the close of 1838, he hit upon a subject which attracted him greatly — a "History of the Conquest of Mexico." He began at once upon preliminary studies, and had made considerable progress when he learned by chance that Prescott, who had recently made a name for himself by his

"Ferdinand and Isabella," was at work upon the same subject. Irving immediately retired from the field, and conveyed a courteous assurance to Prescott of his satisfaction in leaving the theme to such hands. He felt this sacrifice keenly, however; the project had appealed to him peculiarly, and he had no other in mind to take its place. For lack of other literary work, therefore, he presently engaged to write a monthly article for the New York "Knickerbocker," at a salary of $2000 a year. The arrangement was just not too irksome to continue for two years.

It is easy to see, then, that at fifty-five Irving was pretty well written out. In the twenty years that remained to him he produced nothing of account except the "Life of Washington," which, like his other works in biography and history, may be regarded as a *tour de force* rather than a spontaneous outcome of his genius.

V

A PUBLIC CHARACTER

THE data of Irving's literary achievements have been brought near a conclusion; what remains to be said may now deal less with what he wrote, and more with what he did and was. It is luckily unnecessary to try for a sharply drawn distinction between his popularity as a writer and as a man. In his home, in society, and in literature the single charm of his personality had made him beloved in the same way. And he had become, in the best sense of the term, a public character. For many years his name had been better known abroad than that of any other living American; and his reception at home after an absence of seventeen years showed in what regard his countrymen had come to hold him. Their pride in his success and gratitude for the new fame he had given a country which was still felt to be on proba-

tion, can hardly account for it; only the confidence of affection could have excused so prolonged an absenteeism.

His peculiar hold upon popular affection cannot be better suggested than by the tone of a letter written by the only Englishman who during Irving's life could pretend to rival him in his peculiar field. In 1841, Irving wrote to Dickens, expressing pleasure in his work. Dickens replied: "There is no man in the world who could have given me the heartfelt pleasure you have, by your kind note of the 13th of last month. There is no living writer, and there are very few among the dead, whose approbation I should feel so proud to earn. And with everything you have written upon my shelves, and in my thoughts, and in my heart of hearts, I may honestly and truly say so. . . . I wish I could find in your welcome letter some hint of an intention to visit England. I can't. I have held it at arm's length, and taken a bird's eye view of it, after reading it a great many times, but there is no greater encouragement in it this way than on a microscopic

inspection. I should love to go with you — as I have gone, God knows how often — into Little Britain, and Eastcheap, and Green Arbor Court, and Westminster Abbey. I should like to travel with you, outside the last of the coaches, down to Bracebridge Hall. It would make my heart glad to compare notes with you about that shabby gentleman in the oilcloth hat and red nose, who sat in the nine-cornered back parlor of the Masons' Arms; and about Robert Preston, and the tallow chandler's widow, whose sitting-room is second nature to me; and about all those delightful places and people that I used to walk about and dream of in the daytime, when a very small and not over-particularly-taken-care-of boy. I have a good deal to say, too, about that dashing Alonzo de Ojeda, that you can't help being fonder of than you ought to be; and much to hear concerning Moorish legend and poor, unhappy Boabdil. Diedrich Knickerbocker I have worn to death in my pocket, and yet I should show you his mutilated carcass with a joy past all expression."

Not long afterward Dickens visited America. Irving and he saw much of each other, though they did not meet many times. Irving presided at a great dinner given to Boz in New York, broke down in his introductory speech, and otherwise endeared himself to his brother author. When presently Dickens went back, he wrote, "I did not come to see you, for I really have not the heart to say 'good-by' again, and felt more than I can tell you when we shook hands last Wednesday."

Pretty soon Irving himself was leaving America. In February, 1842, he was startled from the home quiet of Sunnyside by a summons which he could not disregard. Daniel Webster, then Secretary of State, had secured his appointment as Minister to Spain. The Senate confirmed it almost by acclamation, and letters came from various quarters urging him to accept it. He could not doubt that the wish was general. But it was very hard for him to leave home and America again. For some time after accepting the post he was plunged into a

dejection which seemed laughable to himself. "The crowning honor of his life," he admitted, had come to him, and he could only groan under it.

"'It is hard, very hard,' he half murmured to himself, half to me; yet he added whimsically enough, being struck with the seeming absurdity of such a view, 'I must try to bear it. God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb'" (P. M. Irving).

In April he sailed from New York, and made a leisurely journey by way of England and France, not reaching Madrid till the end of July. Europe had lost its old charm. Many places reminded him painfully of the favorite brother Peter who had shared his first impressions of them, and whose loss was one of the keenest griefs of his life. "My visit to Europe has by no means the charm of former visits," he wrote from Paris; "scenes and objects have no longer the effect of novelty with me. I am no longer curious to see great sights or great people, and have been so long accustomed to a life of quiet, that I find the turmoil of the world becomes irk-

some to me. Then I have a house of my own, a little domestic world, created in a manner by my own hand, which I have left behind, and which is continually haunting my thoughts, and coming in contrast with the noisy, tumultuous, heartless world in which I am called to mingle. However, I am somewhat of a philosopher, and can accommodate myself to changes, so I shall endeavor to resign myself to the splendor of courts and the conversation of courtiers, comforting myself with the thought that the time will come when I shall once more return to sweet little Sunnyside, and be able to sit on a stone fence, and talk about politics and rural affairs with Neighbor Forkel and Uncle Brom."

At Madrid he very soon found himself too much occupied for the literary work he had counted on. He had accepted the place under the impression that his duties would not greatly interfere with the writing of the "Life of Washington," on which he was then fairly launched. But from the beginning he found the situation in Spain unexpect-

edly absorbing. It was the usual Spanish situation, to be sure: a designing pretender, a child monarch, a court honeycombed with intrigue, and a people ready for anything spectacular. When Irving was presented to the young queen, she was closely guarded. "On ascending the grand staircase, we found the portal at the head of it, opening into the royal suite of apartments, still bearing the marks of the midnight attack upon the palace in October last, when an attempt was made to get possession of the persons of the little queen and her sister, to carry them off. . . . The marble casements of the doors had been shattered in several places, and the double doors themselves pierced all over with bullet-holes, from the musketry that played upon them from the staircase during that eventful night. What must have been the feelings of those poor children, on listening from their apartment to the horrid tumult, the outcries of a furious multitude, and the reports of fire-arms, echoing and reverberating through the vaulted halls and spacious courts of the immense

edifice, and dubious whether their own lives were not the object of the assault!" Such an appeal to Irving's sympathy and chivalry was enough to deprive the situation of its quality of opéra-bouffe.

Presently an insurrection takes place in Barcelona. The regent hurries off to quell it, and Irving's letters are full of the pomp and circumstance of war. The regent is successful, and returns apparently firmer than ever in power. But a few months later the trouble breaks out again, more seriously; Madrid is placed in a state of siege, and martial law declared. The life of the queen is thought to be in danger, and the diplomatic corps, headed by Irving, offers its services for her protection. Finally the regent is driven out of power, and blows are once again succeeded by intrigue. Such, briefly, was the character of the little drama in which the quiet American author was to take a significant part, during his whole ministry. This Spanish experience is fully recorded in his family letters. He was always a voluminous letter-writer; dur-

ing this period he is fairly encyclopedic. A single letter to his sister fills thirteen closely printed pages of his nephew's biography. His official dispatches, too, were very full and thorough. Webster valued them particularly, and remarked that he "always laid aside every other correspondence to read a diplomatic dispatch from Mr. Irving." He had time, too, for many charming chatty letters to the nieces at Sunnyside. Here is a Thackerayish passage from one of them: "You seem to pity the poor little queen, shut up with her sister like two princesses in a fairy tale, in a great, grand, dreary palace, and wonder whether she would not like to change her situation for a nice little cottage on the Hudson? Perhaps she would, Kate, if she knew anything of the gayeties of cottage life; if she had ever been with us at a picnic, or driven out in the shandry-dan with the two roans, and James, in his slipshod hat, for a coachman, or *yotted* in the Dream, or sang in the Tarrytown choir, or shopped at Tommy Dean's; but, poor thing! she

would not know how to set about enjoying herself. She would not think of appearing at church without a whole train of the Miss ——s and the Miss ——s, and the Miss ——s, as maids of honor, nor drive through Sleepy Hollow except in a coach and six, with a cloud of dust, and a troop of horsemen in glittering armor. So I think, Kate, we must be content with pitying her, and leaving her in ignorance of the comparative desolateness of her situation."

In 1842, Irving suffered another of those petty persecutions which he was not thick-skinned enough to endure without suffering, nor confident enough to ignore. The charges were of the most ordinary sort, and advanced by men of little weight: he had appropriated material without giving due credit for it, and he had puffed his own work. Their only claim upon our notice lies in the fact that Irving thought it worth while to confute them at length. He was perhaps especially sensitive to critical attacks at this time. His income from literary property had nearly ceased. Some of his books were

out of print, and the rest were having comparatively little sale. A wave of indifference had overtaken his public. "Everything behind me seems to have turned to chaff and stubble," he wrote. "And if I desire any further profits from literature, it must be by the further exercise of my pen." It is characteristic of his modesty that he was disposed to accept this momentary neglect as final. He planned to revise all his works, in the hope of finding a renewed market for them later, but evidently expected little.

A letter to Brevoort from Bordeaux dated November, 1843, accounts for the first break in his Madrid residence: "I am now on my way back to my post, after between two and three months' absence. I set out in pursuit of health, and thought a little traveling and a change of air would 'make me my own man again'; but I was laid by the heels at Paris by a recurrence of my malady, and have just escaped out of the doctor's hands. . . . This indisposition has been a sad check upon all my plans. I had hoped, by zealous employment of all the leisure afforded

me at Madrid, to accomplish one or two literary tasks which I have in hand. . . . A year, however, has now been lost to me, and a precious year, at my time of life. The 'Life of Washington,' and indeed all my literary tasks, have remained suspended; and my pen has remained idle, excepting now and then in writing a dispatch to Government, or scrawling a letter to my family. In the mean time the income which I used to derive from farming out my writings has died away, and my moneyed investments yield scarce any interest. . . . However, thank God, my health and with it my capacity for work are returning. I shall soon again have pen in hand, and hope to get two or three good years of literary labor out of myself."

After his return to Spain he was again laid by. He was disappointed, but not discouraged, for the self-pity of the invalid never deprived him of his strong man's humor. "When I drive out and notice the opening of spring, I feel sometimes almost moved to tears at the thought that in

a little while I shall again have the use of my limbs, and be able to ramble about and enjoy these green fields and meadows. It seems almost too great a privilege. I am afraid when I once more sally forth and walk the streets, I shall feel like a boy with a new coat, who thinks everybody will turn around to look at him. 'Bless my soul, how that gentleman has the use of his legs!'" A few days after this was written, he got word that one of his friends had just undergone a successful surgical operation. "God bless these surgeons and dentists!" he exclaims. "May their good deeds be returned upon them a thousand fold! May they have the felicity, in the next world, to have successful operations performed upon them to all eternity!"

By this time he had come to take Spanish politics rather too seriously. The insincerity and profligacy of the Spanish character, the corruption of the court and state, fairly sicken him: "The last ten or twelve years of my life," he writes, "have shown me so much of the dark side of human nature, that I

begin to have painful doubts of my fellow men, and look back with regret to the confiding period of my literary career, when, poor as a rat, but rich in dreams, I beheld the world through the medium of my imagination, and was apt to believe men as good as I wished them to be." His sense of responsibility for the young queen oppressed him, and he looked forward impatiently to the hour of his release.

A year later he had gained far better health and spirits. On his sixty-second birthday — "I caught myself bounding upstairs three steps at a time, to the astonishment of the porter, and checked myself, recollecting that it was not the pace befitting a minister and a man of my years." His mental life had, however, caught the sober tone of age. "I am now at that time of life when the mind has a stock of recollections on which to employ itself; and though these may sometimes be of a melancholy nature, yet it is a 'sweet-souled melancholy,' mellowed and softened by the operation of time, and has no bitterness in it. . . .

When I was young, my imagination was always in the advance, picturing out the future, and building castles in the air; now memory comes in the place of imagination, and I look back over the region I have traveled. Thank God, the same plastic feeling, which used to deck all the future with the hues of fairyland, throws a soft coloring over the past, until the very roughest places, through which I struggled with many a heartache, lose all their asperity in the distance."

In July, 1846, his successor arrived, and Irving was free to leave Europe for the last time. His services in Spain had brought nothing but honor to himself and his country; he had earned a right to the quiet years that followed in his favorite home nook at Sunnyside.

Soon after his return he began to busy himself with the revised edition of his works which he had projected in Spain. It was disheartening to find his old publishers dubious about undertaking the republication, and for a time the work went hard. "I am

growing a sad laggard in literature," he wrote to his nephew, "and need some one to bolster me up occasionally. I am too ready to do anything else rather than write." For more than a year his time was largely devoted to overseeing an enlargement of the cottage, and a renovation of the grounds, at Sunnyside. At last he got it all into satisfactory order. "My own place has never been so beautiful as at present. I have made more openings by pruning and cutting down trees, so that from the piazza I have several charming views of the Tappan Zee and the hills beyond, all set, as it were, in verdant flames; and I am never tired of sitting there in my old Voltaire chair of a long summer morning with a book in my hand, sometimes reading, sometimes musing, and sometimes dozing, and mixing all up in a pleasant dream." As for New York, "For my part, I dread the noise and turmoil of it, and visit it but now and then, preferring the quiet of my country retreat; which shows that the bustling time of life is over with me, and that I am settling down

into a sober, quiet, good-for-nothing old gentleman."

This was all very well — for a mood. He spent the next winter in town, moving freely in society, and "not missing a single performance" of the opera. "One meets all one's acquaintances at the opera, and there is much visiting from box to box, and pleasant conversation, between the acts. The opera house is in fact the great feature of polite society in New York, and I believe is the great attraction that keeps me in town. Music is to me the great sweetener of existence, and I never enjoyed it more abundantly than at present." Clearly, the old social instinct was by no means dead in him, however he might express himself in less buoyant moods.

Two years after his return from Spain the house of Putnam agreed to publish the revised edition of his works on very liberal terms — a twelve and a half per cent. royalty. The result of the enterprise was a surprise to author and publisher, for during the ten remaining years of his life the royal-

ties amounted to more than $88,000. The arrangement brought about an immediate accession of courage and power, and he returned with fresh zeal to the "Life of Washington." "All I fear," he said, "is to fail in health, and fail in completing this work at the same time. If I can only live to finish it, I would be willing to die the next moment. I think I can make it a most interesting book. If I had only ten years more of life! I never felt more able to write. I might not conceive as I did in earlier days, when I had more romance of feeling, but I could execute with more rapidity and freedom." The consciousness of approaching age grew stronger in him, but without weakening his capacity for enjoyment or his turn for humorous expression. Early in 1850, George Ticknor sent him a copy of his "History of Spanish Literature." Irving dipped into it, liked it, and "When I have once read it through," he wrote, "I shall keep it by me, like a Stilton cheese, to give a dig into whenever I want a relishing morsel. I began to fear it would never see

the light in my day, or that it might fare with you as with that good lady who went thirteen years with child, and then brought forth a little old man, who died in the course of a month of extreme old age. But you have produced three strapping volumes, full of life and freshness and vigor, that will live forever." This sounds well for Ticknor; but it needs only a glance at Irving's recorded correspondence to see that he was inclined to overestimate the work of others. That kind heart must needs assume the functions of a head which was very well able to take care of itself.

In larger matters his judgment was often colored, but seldom warped, by feeling. The line between sentiment and common sense is clearly drawn in his comment upon the Kossuth obsession which held New York in 1852. "I have heard and seen Kossuth both in public and private, and he is really a noble fellow, quite the beau ideal of a poetic hero. . . . He is a kind of man that you would idolize. Yet, poor fellow, he has come here under a great mistake, and is doomed to be

disappointed in the high-wrought expectations he had formed of coöperation on the part of our government in the affairs of his unhappy country. Admiration and sympathy he has in abundance from individuals; but there is no romance in councils of state or deliberative assemblies. There, cool judgment and cautious policy must restrain and regulate the warm impulses of feeling. I trust we are never to be carried away, by the fascinating eloquence of this second Peter the Hermit, into schemes of foreign interference, that would rival the wild enterprises of the Crusades." The letter concludes in a minor strain: "It is now half-past twelve at night, and I am sitting here scribbling in my study, long after the family are abed and asleep — a habit I have fallen much into of late. Indeed, I never fagged more steadily with my pen than I do at present. I have a long task in hand, which I am anxious to finish, that I may have a little leisure in the brief remnant of life that is left to me. However, I have a strong presentiment that I shall die in harness; and I am

content to do so, provided I have the cheerful exercise of intellect to the last."

By this time some of his Western investments had begun to make handsome returns. With an easy pocket, and a single congenial task for his leisure, it seemed that Irving's last years were certain to be peacefully rounded. Unfortunately his health did not hold; all his former ailments came back upon him, and the "Life of Washington" became an Old Man of the Sea, which one wishes heartily he might have been rid of. A visit to Saratoga in the summer of 1852, and the company of many pretty women, seemed for the moment to lift the years from his shoulders. "No one seemed more unconscious of the celebrity to which he had attained," wrote one of his Saratoga acquaintances, long after. "In this there was not a particle of affectation. Nothing he shrank from with greater earnestness and sincerity and (I may add) pertinacity, than any attempt to lionize him." His name was used to conjure with too often for his comfort. An "Irving Literary Union" had been

formed in New York. Irving's attitude toward it was amusing and characteristic; he was always invited to attend the anniversary meeting, always accepted, and always stayed away.

Events abroad continued to interest him. His sister had sent an account from Paris of the marriage of Louis Napoleon. "Louis Napoleon and Eugénie Montijo, Emperor and Empress of France!" he wrote. "One of whom I have had a guest at my cottage on the Hudson; the other of whom, when a child, I have had on my knee at Granada! It seems to cap the climax of the strange dramas of which Paris has been the theatre during my lifetime."

In 1855, "Wolfert's Roost" was published. Most of its contents had figured years before in the "Knickerbocker Magazine." It is one of the best of his miscellaneous collections, and should be better known to the modern reader of Irving. Thereafter, his work was over, except for the "Life of Washington," which was to appear in parts during the next three years. Its merits

were perhaps exaggerated at the time; to the modern critic they lie chiefly in its possession of the lucid simplicity of method without which its author could not write, and in the life which it infuses into a cold abstraction. If this is not Washington, it is at least a living and breathing person, whose interest for us lies not altogether in his career.

These closing years were sadly clouded by sleeplessness and depression of spirits, from which at times he roused himself to bursts of his old brilliancy and humor. A year before his death he said to one of the innumerable inquiries about his health, "I have a streak of old age. Pity, when we have grown old, we could not turn round and grow young again, and die of cutting our teeth." A few months later, when he had begun to be troubled with difficulty of breathing, he had a long and prosy letter from a total stranger, who proposed a call. "Oh, if he could only give me his long wind," gasped Irving, "he should be most welcome."

We need not follow here the rather pitiful struggle of those last months. "I do not fear death," said he, "but I would like to go down with all sail set." The thoughts of the gradual loss of his faculties haunted him with curious insistency. He conceived a dislike for his own room, could not bear to be alone, and hung with pathetic eagerness to the companionship of the few whom he held dearest. His fear was groundless. To the end his mind remained clear; and on the 29th of November, 1859, he "went down with all sail set."

VI

THE MAN HIMSELF

One is tempted to ask himself, in concluding a review of this man's life and work, what it was that he peculiarly stood for; what new kind of excellence he brought into being, and how far it survived him. Oddly enough, the accident of his birthplace is made at once his chief merit, and the subtle derogation of that merit; he is the first distinguished name in American letters, and he is "the American Addison." From the outset one who wishes to study his work is hampered by the fact of place. One must be always considering solemnly, "Although he was an American, he succeeded in doing this," or, "Because he was an American, he might have done that," till one is fairly inclined to wish that his English parents had not happened to marry and settle in New York. As a matter of fact, there are few

writers against whom the point of nationality may be pushed with less pertinence.

It is plain that earlier American writing interests us only in a local and guarded sense. The critical microscope discovers certain merits; but the least shifting of the eye-piece throws the object out of field. We value what these men wrote because of what they did as Americans, or stood for in American life. Of Irving and a few later writers this is not true. And our regard for them may lead us to suspect that from the literary point of view, it is better to be great than American; or at least that there is no formula to express the ratio between a writer's Americanism and his literary power. The historian esteems a flavor of nationality in literature; to the lover of pure letters, it is only a superior sort of local color. Irving's distinction is that he was the first prophet of pure letters in America. This is to speak thickly; and it will not help matters greatly to say that the mark of pure letters is style. The application of that foggy term to such a writer as Irving is

likely to be particularly unfair; it has not been spared him. He has had more praise for his style than for anything else; indeed, it has been commonly suggested that there is little else to praise him for. This is, of course, a survival of the old notion that style is a sort of achievement in decorative art; that fine feathers may do much for the literary bird, at least. The style of a writer like Irving — a mere loiterer in the field of letters — is at best a creditable product of artifice. To him even so much credit has not been always allowed; the clever imitator of Addison — or, as some sager say, of Goldsmith — has not even invented a manner; he has borrowed one.

Fortunately, novelty of form is a very different thing from literary excellence. Irving wrote like a well-bred Englishman, brought up in the sound traditions of the days of good Queen Anne. Whatever local merit his work may have, belongs to theme rather than to treatment. Its delicate humor is as far as possible from what has come to be known as American humor. His only

conscious Americanism in motive — to speak of him merely as an artist — was to show England that "an American could write decent English." At that time, it seems, Englishmen considered this to be a good thing for an American to do; and the poet Campbell's remark was thought to be high praise: that Washington Irving had "added clarity to the English tongue." This was a service of which the language just then stood sadly in need. There are always men ready enough to make English turbid, to wreak their ingenuity upon oddities of phrase and diction. At that moment, certainly, the anxious courtier of words was not so much needed as the easy autocrat, whose style, however cavalier, should have grace and firmness and clarity to commend it. When Irving began to express himself, there was very little straightforward simple writing being done, either in America or in England. The stuffed buckram of Johnsonese had been succeeded by the mincing hifalutin of Mrs. Anne Radcliffe and her like. It is at least to Irving's credit that

his taste led him back half a century to the comparative simplicity and purity of the prim Augustan style. But it is odd that it should have been for this acquired manner that the world thought it liked him while he lived, and has chiefly praised him since he died.

But after all, as was said of Milton in a different connection, Irving has worn "the garb, but not the clothes, of the ancients." His kinship to them in temper of thought and feeling was closer than his resemblance in manner. Like Addison and Goldsmith, he wins his audience through sheer charm of personality. To open one of his books is like meeting a congenial stranger. You like his looks at first glance, you feel somehow that he likes yours; and while you may be hesitating about advances, he is at your side, and there is nothing more to be said. You do not care whether he is American or English, you are not particular what he talks about, but you do not willingly part with him.

The charm of creative genius is less the

charm of mind than of feeling. And it is to feeling refined and colored by temperament, that the more delicate modes of belles-lettres owe their whole power. That is, a writer in this sort is admirable as he subdues language and subordinates thought to his own temper, not as he gives elegant utterance to thought or feeling in their abstracted and general estate. Through a surface artificiality of style, which is far more marked in his earliest work, and from which at times he quite escapes, Irving's personality shines clearly. He has so employed a conventional medium as to make it serve his original purposes. He possessed, to be sure, a faculty of strong vernacular speech, which is little suggested in his to-be-published writing, or even in his private letters. The Oregon embroilment had led certain British journals into gross speech about America. Irving was much disturbed. What he wrote was, "A rancorous prejudice against us has been diligently inculcated of late years by the British press, and it is daily producing its fruits of bitterness." What he said was:

"Bulwer," — then English minister to Spain, — "I should deplore exceedingly a war with England, for depend upon it, if we must come to blows, it will be serious work for both. You might break our head at first, but by Heaven! we would break your back in the end!"

But one need not write in the vernacular to be sincere and effective; personality may utter itself through different media, whether in different tongues or in distinct strata of the same tongue. Just now we have a bent toward colloquialism on paper; it was not the bent of Irving's day.

As far as the external features of his style are concerned, he has had praise enough, and more than enough. Clearness, ease, a certain Gallic grace it has; the ink flows readily, the thing says itself without crabbedness or constraint. On the other hand this ready writer is often conventional; a set phrase contents him, why should he labor to escape the usual formula? He knew nothing of the struggle or the reward of the artist in words, who wrestles for the exact *nuance*,

and will not let a sentence go till he has obtained its blessing. Consequently he is never finicking in his phraseology, and seldom final. The subtle artfulness of Stevenson is beyond him; but he has a rarer quality — that subtler artlessness which has belonged in some measure to all the greater writers of sentiment. It is a quality independent of the mechanics of writing; whether the author echoes the syntax of Addison or the diction of Goldsmith is an indifferent question. All that we know is that, through his use of words or in spite of it, a new melody has come into being, a golden *motif* which is to ring in the world's ears nobody knows how long.

It seems idle to say of such a man that because he does not concern himself with "the mystery of existence," and "the solemn eternities," he has nothing to say. Surely the simple-souled artist may leave such matters for the philosophers and theologians to deal with. Surely his "message" is as significant as theirs. Irving is admirable not mainly because he "wrote beautifully," but

because he said something which no one else could say: he uttered the most meaning of all messages — himself. And if literature is really a criticism of life, such a message from such a man has, it would seem, dignity enough.

Evidently Irving, like Goldsmith and Oliver Wendell Holmes, owed his amazing influence largely to his cheerful and wholesome this-worldliness. He was a sentimentalist, but obviously different in spirit from the two great English writers of sentiment who were most nearly his contemporaries. Thackeray is sophisticated; fortune's buffets have left him still a tender interest in life, but pity rather than hopefulness gives color to his mood. Dickens's sentiment seldom rings perfectly true; too often it is sharped to flippancy, or flatted to mawkishness. The tone of Irving, in sentiment or in humor, is the clear and even utterance of a healthy nature. It was a period of sickly sentimentalism in which he began to write; men drew tears frequently and mechanically then, as they drew corks. The sentimentalist passed

easily from broad mirth to unwinking pathos. Fortunately that weakest mood of sentiment without humor came seldom to Irving; he wrote only one "History of Margaret Nicholson."

It was his nature to be achingly considerate of others, so that he was a better friend than critic; and he was as careful of their good opinion as of their comfort. Always doubtful what treatment his work would meet, and even what it deserved, he would ask his friends to say nothing about it, unless they liked it. "One condemning whisper," said one of them, "sounded louder in his ear than the plaudits of thousands." Socially, on the other hand, he never had the least doubt of himself. The tastes and manner of a gentleman did not need to be acquired; there was no question of his fitness for any society. During his whole career, thrown as he was into the choicest company of two continents, there was evidently not the least suspicion of embarrassment or awkwardness in his quiet bearing.

He was in the largest sense of the word a

generous man; and even in the smaller sense his generosity has distinction and significance. Addison we know to have been a little on the hither side of open-handedness. Goldsmith was by his own satirical confession the "good-natured man," to whom giving was a conscious indulgence. Irving was simply not aware that he gave; to share his best was a natural function. And it is our sense of this, of being admitted as a matter of course to share in all that he is and has, which largely explains his delightfulness as man and author.

Citizen of the world as he was in his literary character, in practical life his Americanism was real and potent. He deplored the War of 1812 and the war with Mexico, but believed firmly that it was no man's duty to go back of the government's decision. In the conduct of his mission to Spain he showed the utmost steadiness, loyalty, and self-possession in many trying situations. He was, in short, a valuable citizen, to whom honors came unsought, and who, out of office, and not desirous of political power, was trusted

by all parties, and tempted by none. The mere existence of such a figure, calm, simple, incorruptible, honored wherever he was known, and known prominently throughout Europe, was a valuable stay to the young republic in that purgatorial first half of the nineteenth century.

One fact about him will perhaps bear emphasis; that with all his gentlenesses he was strong and firm and full of spirit. He was susceptible to advice, yet nobody ever forced him to do a thing that was against his mind or conscience. That he was amiable, congenial, companionable — we do not forget these traits of his; we should remember, too, that he never faced an emergency to which he did not prove himself equal. His personal hold upon his contemporaries was plainly due to the fact that their confidence in him as a man was as perfect as their delight in him as an artist. What he did was, after all, only a little part of what he was.

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